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**A Lot of Work for Little Money: How Independent
Creators in Czechia Monetize Written Content**

Master's thesis

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Study program: Media Studies

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Jablonec nad Nisou on 30th of April 2020

Adam Romaňák

References

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Abstract

This study examines how independent writers in Czechia operate at the intersection of creative processes and management of their writing ventures. With a leading set of research questions, this paper delves into the array of contemporary methods and tools used for monetization, considers their influence on content creation, explores the relation to underlying motivations of writers and investigates the current intermediary landscape in the field. As a first academic probe into the topic in the country, the research introduces key concepts and then takes the inductive approach of a qualitative study conducting 7 in-depth interviews with local independent creators and employing grounded theory for the data analysis. The themes emerging from the research of this population sample suggest that local independent writers exhibit a high degree of resourcefulness in their monetization strategies as they combat inherent uncertainties of their vocation. They are also mainly driven by intrinsic motivations in their creation, and while they enjoy a great deal of creative freedom thanks to their independent status attained by often becoming self-publishers, the findings show that the traditional intermediaries such as publishing houses remain highly relevant in the field.

Keywords

Independent writers, self-publishing, content monetization, cultural intermediaries, creative freedom, creative motivation, source credibility, disintermediation, re-intermediation

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá, jak nezávislí autoři textů v Česku operují na hranici kreativních procesů a managementu jejich autorských podniků. Prostřednictvím sady výzkumných otázek práce prochází soubor aktuálně dostupných metod a nástrojů pro monetizaci textových obsahů, analyzuje jejich vliv na tvorbu obsahů, sleduje jejich napojení na základní autorské motivace a prozkoumává současný stav oblasti kulturních zprostředkovatelů v oboru psaní a publikování. Jakožto první lokální akademické šetření v této oblasti, práce nejdříve představuje klíčové koncepty a následně se vydává cestou kvalitativní studie, která se prostřednictvím sedmi polostrukturovaných rozhovorů snaží induktivní metodou zakotvené teorie identifikovat motivy a možné teoretické koncepty. Výsledky výzkumné části opřené o vzorek cílové populace přitom naznačují, že tuzemští nezávislí autoři vykazují vysokou úroveň vynalézavosti při tvorbě vlastních strategií monetizace, přičemž překonávají nejistotu neoddelitelně spjatou s autorskou profesí. Členové zkoumaného vzorku také inklinovali k vnitřním motivacím jako zdroji energie pro tvůrčí úsilí. Ačkoliv se jim pak během tvorby díky metodě vydávání ve vlastním nákladu a statutu nezávislých autorů dostávalo velkého množství tvůrčí svobody, celkové výsledky výzkumu naznačují, že tradiční kulturní zprostředkovatelé jako nakladatelství si udržují relevanci a funkci v oboru.

Klíčová slova

Nezávislí autoři, vydávání ve vlastním nákladu, monetizace obsahu, kulturní zprostředkovatelé, tvůrčí svoboda, tvůrčí motivace, důvěryhodnost zdroje, desintermediace, re-intermediace

Název práce

Spousta práce za málo peněz: Jak nezávislí tvůrci v Česku monetizují psaný obsah

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1 Introduction

The history of literature and writing is filled with stories of renowned authors taking up almost any job out there to provide for themselves as they strived to break through with their creative passions. Vladimir Nabokov was in charge of curating butterfly collections, Kurt Vonnegut ran a car dealership, Arthur Conan Doyle had a medical practice and in Prague, Franz Kafka served as an insurance clerk (Leibowitz, 2017; Jones, 2017). In some cases, the success of their written works allowed writers to leave their previous vocations behind and focus solely on their writing careers (Nelson, 2019). This success often depended on the will and influence of other people – patrons, sponsors or publishers – that had the necessary capital or held the keys to the means of content distribution. However, more than ever before the allocation of resources and powers in relation to writing and publishing has changed significantly with the global spread of the Internet. The influence of cultural intermediaries who held the means to publish or distribute and thus also profit on written content has been decreasing. Much like the monks who lost their privileged position to write and publish books after the invention of the printing press, the position of publishers and media houses has been severely threatened by the Internet (Towse, 2014). As the World Wide Web was spreading globally and its user base growing at a never-before-seen pace, the technology brought along a whole new world of opportunities. Authors and creators could now address their readers as well as completely new audiences themselves, using various available platforms. And while some of these tools may serve primarily as channels to promote their writing, others offer them the opportunity to monetize their work. This gives authors several options to choose from in order to generate revenue from their content. Global funding platforms such as Kickstarter or Patreon together with sponsorships, advertisements and other business strategies allow them to work and write independently so they do not need to pursue signed contracts with publishers, media houses or be employed in related areas.

Regardless of what tools the authors decide to use, every single mode of distribution and monetization alike can potentially influence the writers themselves and the creative process they engage in. As Colin Dickey (2017) notes, how can you trust an author once you learn that some writers in past centuries were paid by the word? When exploring the ways today's writers and authors get paid for their work, it is imperative to consider how these can influence the creation of the content in the first place. While some of the contemporary

tools often allow for easier access to the target audience, they also enable the audience to give feedback to the author, either in the form of comments or messages, or in the form of data. This effectively widens the array of possible influences in respect to the content and raises more questions. How, for instance, will a content creator's intention to write about certain topics be affected once they find out through their website monitoring of their visitors that the topic does not resonate with their target audience? Does the author follow the economic rules of supply and demand and attend to their fanbase, or do they exercise creative freedom? Are they motivated by their creative desires or external monetary rewards?

In pursuit of answers to these questions, this research focuses predominantly on a population of independent creators of written content in Czech Republic. In particular, creators who operate without permanent contracts with news media or retaining deals with publishing houses. The reason for this is that these organizations themselves serve as intermediaries who detach authors from the business side of production and distribution of written content. This paper, however, examines how independent authors operate and perform at the intersection of creative processes and management of their writing ventures. That being said, the issues of written content and its monetization have been intrinsically connected with the publishing industry for more than 2000 years. Their development is the story of intermediaries in this field and is thus given an appropriate amount of attention on the following pages.

1.1 Research questions

Previous studies have explored the shifts in monetization strategies in the music industry (e.g. Brown, 2011; Regner & Barria, 2009) or gaming (e.g. Cha, 2017; Arakji, & Lang, 2007). However, the domain of written content monetization remains to be covered in the literature. Therefore, this study explores the different approaches of contemporary creators to monetization of written content in Czech Republic. Ultimately, this thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do independent writers in Czechia monetize their content?

RQ2: How do the different methods of monetization influence the practice of content creation as such?

RQ3: What intermediaries are currently involved in the content monetization process?

RQ4: What are the underlying motivations of independent creators to write and publish their work?

1.2 Topic adjustments

Diverging from the thesis proposal forms, a few adjustments were made to the expected thesis structure. A closer look into the methods of monetization which were anticipated to provide a direct link between the creators and the audience revealed that these still include intermediaries, making *direct* monetization rather an elusive concept. The title of the paper was thus adjusted using a quote from the actual research. Moreover, after initial research some of the methods that were expected to be among the focal points of this thesis, such as the pay-what-you-want model as introduced later, were shown to be underrepresented in the country and were not extensively covered. At the same time, the theories of cultural intermediaries as well as motivation and source credibility were included into the theoretical framework of this thesis and accordingly, analyzed in the research part.

2 Theoretical framework

This chapter covers the theoretical background and main concepts of this thesis. A brief look into the history of writing and publishing with a special focus on the actual monetization of written works introduces the main concepts and roles as they developed over time. This is important for grasping the different dynamics at play in the field. Thus, key concepts such as intermediary landscape, motivations for writing, source credibility and the individual tools for content monetization are subsequently elaborated on to provide us with a fundamental understanding of the topic.

2.1 Brief history of written content monetization

As is common with many cultural aspects of Western civilization, we can track the first steps in the practice of monetization of written content to Ancient Greece, where the first poets were dependent on the patronage system. In the words of Colin Dickey (2017): “In exchange for food, lodging, and prestige, poets would provide wealthy benefactors with writing that extolled their virtues, as well as act as general companions and creative writing coaches.” While the patronage system prevailed for many centuries as we shall touch on later, an alternative was also introduced in the time of antiquity when poet Simonides started charging his clients on a word count basis and handled all the financial aspects of his writing venture himself (Martin, 2017).

In Ancient Rome, the demand for scriptures grew in the upper class. This gave birth to precursors of publishing houses, where as many as 30 books were made at the same time using slave labor. The publishers’ role started to take the form as we know it today; they chose the manuscripts for reproduction and advanced money to the authors for the rights to the manuscripts. This way they took upon themselves the risk of the financial success or failure of the books (Unwin, Tucker & Unwin, 2019).

After the fall of the Roman Empire, it was the Church that assumed the de facto role of main publisher for the Western world. The monastic houses in the Middle Ages had scriptoria where monks copied books to add to their collections of religious texts. An expansion in book production came with the rise of demand for books created by universities in the 12th century. Following the emergence of humanism and growing literacy among the population, the content of books diversified creating more demand (Unwin, Tucker & Unwin, 2019). While some artists like Dante Alighieri belonged to rich noble families and thus needed not to provide for themselves with their writing alone, others such as Giovanni

Boccaccio turned to the rediscovered practice of patronage. Across art disciplines, artists and creators worked with or were supported by patrons to produce art that has served political, economic and cultural functions (Swords, 2017). Both of the abovementioned Italian authors also show that their writing activities alone did not provide them with a living as they both served as ambassadors to their nobility.

2.1.1 Transformations brought about by the printing press

Writing and publishing underwent its most significant transformation in the 15th century when the printing press was invented. Non-religious entities gained extended access to printing, and while the Church was actively trying to censor books that were being published and even restored the Inquisition, censorship could not keep up with the volume of books that were being produced. The industry was born with most of the early firms being small printer-publishers, and this later shifted with some firms focusing solely on activities connected with publishing and leaving out the actual printing. The following centuries then saw important developments in the organization of the book trade which moved gradually toward its modern form (Unwin, Tucker & Unwin, 2019). “The key functions of publishing, selecting the material to be printed and bearing the financial risk of its production, shifted from the printer to the bookseller and from him to the publisher in his own right; the author, too, at last came into his own.” (Ibid). However, as some authors had either possessed the required resources or were rejected by established publishers the practice of self-publishing became increasingly common from the 19th century onwards with authors like William Blake, Jane Austen and Walt Whitman taking this path (Patterson, 2012).

Introduction of the printing press changed the market in yet another way. Since printed goods could now be reproduced and circulated in great volumes, the works of any author were a potential victim of piracy. The first legislation which aimed at warranting authors the right to demand payments for use of their content existed on a mostly national or local level. This allowed for the method of royalty payments to spread in the industry and its appeal grew immensely towards the end of the century as the first international agreements for copyright were introduced. At the turn of the 20th century, authors in Great Britain and the United States also created professional associations that helped standardize contracts and deals for members as well as fair payments of royalties. Around the same time, the first literary agents opened-up their businesses. Realizing that very often authors themselves could not negotiate the best possible contracts, so they served as middlemen between writers

and publishers with the goal of securing higher rates on royalties or bigger advancements (Unwin, Tucker & Unwin, 2019).

Last but not least, the printing press also allowed for newspapers to become widespread. This opened a new avenue for writers to get paid for their work, with some of them becoming professional journalists with monthly wages while others chose a path of independent contributors paid by piece (Unwin, Tucker & Unwin, 2019). The periodical issuing of newspapers and magazines also saw the introduction of a subscription-based business model, in which the customers pay a set price for access to the product. Other printed media have made use of the space on their pages to sell advertisements introducing modern marketing into the mix of income sources (Clapp, 1931).

2.1.2 The age of the Internet

In the ensuing decades, the industry grew increasingly professional leading to a very efficient mass production of books and other content on one side, but also an increasing number of intermediaries and gatekeepers that stood in between the writer and delivery of content to the actual reader. This changed with the introduction of the Internet. The evolving technology of the World Wide Web and its ever-growing number of users meant that writers could now approach their audience directly, firstly through websites and later via social media. The entry barriers for publishing widely accessible written content were lowered. Furthermore, the nature of the online environment allowed for new formats to emerge and with them a whole new generation of writers (Towse, 2014). The habit of keeping diaries moved online and later evolved into blogging (Robinson, 2019). The opportunity to publish one's own content online was almost immediately followed by the ability to earn money for it. As readership of blogs and websites in general expanded, advertisers and sponsors became interested in the medium, and it wasn't only the biggest names and websites with mainstream appeal for marketing purposes that were attractive. On the internet, all thinkable interest groups and niche audiences could be represented. Despite the empirical evidence suggesting that even in online environment, the minority of creators and outlets earn majority of financial resources and dominate the activities they engage in, an effect known as the Superstar phenomenon (Rosen, 1981) smaller players were able to flourish and thrive in the same environment. This is explained by the Long tail theory which states that the combination of decreasing production as well as marketing costs caused by democratization

of technology renders even niche markets with relatively low sale numbers profitable (Anderson, 2004).

However, the rise of the Internet also caused other markets with written word to tumble. Facing decreases in circulation, readership and subsequently advertising revenues, newspapers and magazines were forced to gradually move online and ultimately scaling down their operations (Towse, 2009). In this market set up, older and more traditional newspaper and magazine brands are competing with newcomers that are fully focused on publishing online and therefore removing the cost of printing.

The Internet presents an opportunity to easily address many differing audiences with written content, and since the costs of delivering that content are significantly lower than in the past, even small, niche audiences can become a source of income for the writer.

2.2 Intermediaries in area of written content

Following Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of a cultural intermediary being a professional involved in producing and circulating symbolic goods and services, we first take a look at the traditional intermediaries that deal with written content. These fulfill many functions from production through regulation, selection, curation to value creation or distribution. Lize (2016) offers a typology of intermediaries in connection to their position in the process between cultural creation and consumption. This typology distinguishes:

mediators who guide the audience along the works (e.g. booksellers or radio DJs);
appraisers-prescribers who assess the qualities of works (critics, experts);
management staff of cultural institutions (museum directors, editors-in-chief);
distributors who bridge production and market (distributors, cinema owners);
production intermediaries who can influence the creation itself and are responsible for delivery of the works (music/film producers, publishers); and
artistic intermediaries who operate either on the side of the creators or artist (managers, agents) or the side of their employers (scouts, buyers).

We can also distribute these actors across five sections of the process according to Picard (2011) including:

content acquisition and creation (writers/creators together with scouts/buyers);
content selection and processing (editors/publishers);
transformation of content into distributable form (editing and design staff);
distribution (printing and logistics); and

marketing and promotion (retailers together with marketing staff).

In addition to these intermediaries involved in the content production and distribution, there are new players whose importance and position needs to be taken into consideration. Digitization and the partial transition of consumers of written content from paper to screen shifted the power balance among the intermediaries. Digital tools have lowered the entry barriers for publishing and allowed masses to produce and distribute content on their own terms, as well as communicate with the audience themselves (Towse, 2014). This course of action, and its kindred in other creative industries, has sparked conversations about disintermediation. Nevertheless, when the former gatekeepers, in our case publishers, can now be left out of the process with the help of web-based, easy-to-use platforms, to a certain extent their power and influence has been passed on to a new set of actors and intermediaries (Swords, 2017).

2.2.1 Intermediaries in online content monetization

There is a simple economical assumption behind these shifts in the intermediary landscape. The number of intermediaries involved in creative industries has reached a point where it became attractive to bypass or remove them altogether (Riemer & Lehrke, 2009). This digital revolution lowered the barriers not only for the creators, but also for other entities to enter the markets. Typically, social media networks or content aggregators such as YouTube, Spotify or Amazon have become the new intermediaries (Hirsch & Gruber, 2015). The resulting process is then not disintermediation, but re-intermediation where new intermediaries displace and replace old ones (French & Leyshon, 2004). Apart from the aforementioned content aggregators, we also need to include providers of content distribution (e.g. website providers), monetizing technology (e.g. Google with AdSense) or dedicated platforms (e.g. Kickstarter or Patreon).

Despite allowing creators to operate sans intermediaries in the attempt to increase their monetary rewards, re-intermediation also brings along new challenges. Without appropriate intermediaries that would identify or confirm value of cultural goods, a certain layer of certification is missing. On one hand, this makes it harder to break through as an unknown creator. On the other, it gives power to platforms and content aggregators that can effectively filter and recommend content to the audience (Towse, 2010). Also, classic intermediaries traditionally took on a substantial part of the risks involved in cultural production. Even

though the financial barriers to enter the cultural markets have lowered, this still creates a great deal of uncertainty (Handke, Stepan & Towse, 2016). Furthermore, Kribs (2016) argues that the result of changes to intermediary dynamics in the digital environment does not have liberating effects for artists and creators but in turn forms a new set of demands since it also makes them responsible for other activities such as managing their social media, brand image or fan relations. From the digital economy perspective, which is characterized by the emergence of new technologies and new types of workers (Terranova, 2000) we can see this as an evolution of the creator's role.

The new workers and pioneers who went out to utilize new technologies and subsequently took part in changing the media landscape as well as the domains of economy were often representatives of the music industry as well as publishing or gaming. As already shown in the classification of intermediaries, the music and publishing industries follow the same principles and have created similar structures over the years. However, these have been broken up by the digital technologies leading and the redefinition of established roles together with the introduction of new actors (Towse, 2014). These have attempted, often successfully, to harness the powers of cooperative fan behavior in combination with communication and distribution changes in attempt to earn more for their work leaving out the established intermediaries of the industry (Belsky, Kahr, Berkelhammer & Benkler, 2010).

2.2.2 Audience and fans

Another significant impact digitization had on creative industries was the empowerment of audiences by improving their ability to interact with, share and give feedback on the content they consume (Galuszka, 2015). In fact, audience activity, more specifically, the data that is congregated from them in the form of ratings and comments to views and visits that enable content aggregators or social networks to effectively filter content (Towse, 2014), generating their main value proposition and allowing them to take on the roles formerly held by *appraisers-prescribers*. By producing abundant volumes of data, audiences then enter the array of cultural intermediaries in online environments with the capacity to indirectly influence cultural production. Moreover, the advancements in digital and especially communication technology empower audiences and fans around the world. On the Internet, they can gather in huge numbers and exert pressure on other actors in the process (e.g. creators or publishers) or simply gain new intermediary function. As an

example, when audiences take on the financial risk associated with cultural production when they help finance production of a cultural good of their choice via the means of crowd-financing (Galuszka, 2015).

At the same time, a whole new dimension of participatory culture sees the audience partake greatly in the production of online content. Here, the user-generated content stands alongside professionally produced texts in claiming audience attention (Benkler, 2006). It is this phenomenon, also known as prosumerism, that leads to questions about the empowerment of the audience. Some argue that by building on their data and time spent creating user-generated content, the audience is being exploited by culture industries and multinational technology companies. In this regard, despite enjoying what they do, the audience creates value for companies that actually turn it into economic capital (Baym & Burnett, 2009).

2.3 Motivations for writing

The reason that keeps the audience partaking in such a culture might be closely related to the motivations of writers themselves. As pointed out by Abbing (2002), creating content or cultural goods gives people an opportunity to express themselves through their work as well as influence the world around them and is thus highly fulfilling. Focusing on creators, this is an intrinsic motivation, that together with external rewards such as recognition and financial gains, serves as a drive to create. However, when we talk about rewards, we also need to recognize their interconnection and consecution. As creators increasingly compete for attention from their audience, they often diversify their sources of income, since they already possess a great deal of knowledge about areas they cover in their writing, they find other revenue streams to capitalize on. Examples include lectures and workshops, consultancy and sale of related goods, such as merchandising. The presence of these other revenue streams leads to questions about the nature of rewards creators set out to gain by writing and the order in which they intend to reach them.

2.3.1 Creative independence and autonomy

It was Simonides, the ancient poet famous for his innovative monetization strategy of being paid by word, who was also one of the first authors whose creative integrity came into questioning. He was accused of stinginess, greed and according to Anna Carson (1999), “economic alienation of writer’s work”, and together with Choerilus, a poet paid directly by

Alexander the Great, can be seen as the ancient precursor to a modern-age *sell-out*. Abbing (2002) sees autonomy today as “the liberty people have to follow their own will independent of others. In the arts, this is primarily seen as a matter of artistic freedom. If an artist chooses to make an artistic compromise in exchange for more rewards, he or she ends up with less artistic freedom.” When reflecting on the possible trade-offs of creative independence and control for more rewards, it is necessary to consider other motivations of creators and artists to engage in their creative processes and productions. The prevalent conception is that creators and artists who are motivated mainly by intrinsic factors are autonomous and independent and their work authentic, whereas creators labeled as commercial derive pleasure primarily from external, often financial, sources.

2.3.2 Source credibility

To investigate the motivations and perception of writers in relation to the rewards and the role of creative independence, this thesis borrows concepts from source credibility theories. Following the original studies of Hovland and his colleagues, two main factors comprising source credibility have been recognized in communication science – expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland and Weiss, 1952; Hovland et al, 1953).¹ In these studies, expertise was defined as “the extent to which communicator is perceived to be source of valid assertions”, and trustworthiness as “the degree of confidence in the communicator’s intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid.” In relation to previously introduced motivations of writers and the perception of their autonomy and independence, this thesis proposes two modes of consecution from motivations to rewards to represent expectations going into the research, as can be seen in Table 1.

¹ Later, Ohanian (1990) extended these by adding attractiveness from studies on source valence (McGuire, 1985), however since the focus of this thesis are creators of written content, the concept of physical attractiveness of the source, that became a benchmark for studies of celebrity endorsements and other advertising strategies, is not being examined.

Mode	Underlying motivation	Utilized source credibility factor	Gained external rewards	Gained Internal rewards
A	Intrinsic	Trustworthiness	Recognition Money Expert status	Self-expression Legacy Influence
B	Extrinsic	Expertise	Recognition Money	Self-expression Legacy Influence

Table 1: Proposed motivation-credibility source-reward modes.

Modes A and B were conceived as an illustrator framework of motivations of the creators to combine their writing work with other sources of income. The goal here is to explore the intentionality of their actions in regard to supplementary activities and writing itself against the theory-based expectations for which the models serve as templates. Although there is a deductive aspect to them, these are not seen as hypotheses to draw generalizable conclusions from and are thus not supposed to be proven or confirmed.

2.4 Contemporary means of content monetization

In the opening chapter of the theory section, we have already touched upon the main types of monetization methods that lie at the center of this thesis. For its purpose, we are distinguishing five main types of methods currently used by independent creators of written content:

tools of marketing nature which include sponsorship deals or using owned media for other advertising purposes. In this group, the financial resources come from the side of advertisers or sponsors;

practice of self-publishing which has shifted from being a choice of few to a widespread phenomenon;

methods of direct sale via own media that enable accumulation of payments directly from the audience in exchange for either access to the content or goods and services related to the creators and their work;

crowd-financing in its various forms as explained later;

alternate revenue streams that deal not with the actual written content but allow creators to capitalize on their brands or expertise.

An overview of all means for content monetization together with involved intermediaries can be seen in Table 2 at the end of the chapter.

Media houses and news organizations too have resorted to strategies of monetization to raise funds for their content on the Internet. These include online advertisements, microtransactions and paywall systems and are similar in nature to the means that are available to the independent authors. With microtransactions for example, a visitor of the website pays for access to a certain piece of content at one point in time. This model proved sustainable mainly for monetizing older or archived pieces on platforms such as *The New York Times* or *Die Welt*. Meanwhile, paywalls are basically an extension of the subscription model as their main purpose is to prohibit users who have not paid for access to the content, or in other words are not subscribed to the service (Arrese, 2016). Both methods correspond with the means of direct sale via own media as discussed later.

2.5 Marketing-based monetization methods

It has become an industry standard for creators of written content today to have their own online media, most commonly websites and social media accounts. In a manner not different from newspapers and magazines, the creators learned to make use of available space and attention of their readers by offering these channels for marketing purposes.

2.5.1 Advertisements

The space in creators' own media can be utilized as media space and sold to advertisers, who want to present their goods, services or causes to a writer's audience. Typically, display advertisements in the form of banners or rich media formats like pop-up videos are displayed on the page. Alternatively, the display advertisement can be made native, meaning the advertised content is presented in the same form and placement as the actual content on the page.

2.5.2 Sponsorships and endorsements

Content creators with substantial following and a strong online presence also serve as an opportunity for businesses to market themselves via sponsorships or endorsements. In the case of writers, they can either promote the goods or services by becoming an ambassador for the brand and being publicly associated with it or produce sponsored content. Such content can be both totally unrelated to the sponsors area of interest or can be tailor made to touch upon the sponsor and their activities to a differing extent.

2.6 Self-publishing

Self-publishing, the practice of authors taking on the financial risk and responsibility of publishing books by themselves, has reached a previously unseen popularity in recent years. This event has been attributed to socio-economic impacts of the technological development as touched upon earlier. Particularly, the democratization of production tools and the rise of web-based forms of distribution allowed for the effect of *the long tail* to fully take place. In other words, not only do people have all the necessary tools to produce a book, they can also potentially access any audiences out there, regardless of their size. The shift to prosumerism also exhibits itself here as more and more people see themselves not just as consumers of media, but also as producers with books being one of many opportunities to achieve that (Lupton, 2011).

The number of self-published electronic and printed books in the US was growing by double digits in the past years, going from over 235,000 in 2011 (Towse, 2014), to over a million in 2017 (Bowker Report, 2018). While the dramatic majority of these do not sell very well, there are exceptions such as Erika Mitchell's *Fifty Shades of Grey*, arguably the most financially successful self-published work to date (Towse, 2014).

2.7 Direct sale via own online media

Acquiring their own media and especially websites allowed creators across fields to offer their works directly to their followers, leaving the retailing intermediaries out of the distribution chain. This way, the creators have de facto entered the area of e-commerce allowing them to sell their works traditionally, as well as e-books. The collected reimbursements can also range from one-time or ongoing payments for otherwise inaccessible content or other goods to voluntary contributions to the creators.

2.7.1 Fixed price

A common approach to monetize written content such as self-published books and e-books through one's own website is to sell the work there directly. This requires a website with certain e-commerce features, such as ability to browse offered items and an online based one payment system. Customers then pay a fixed price for the work they buy, then have it delivered or gain access to an online version when the payment is processed. The innovation here lies in the fact that creators manage the sale and distribution themselves, leaving

retailers out of the process. Clearly, this is the optimal method for distribution of e-books or other works that do not exist in physical form.

2.7.2 Voluntary payment models

When content creators decide to offer his or her content without involving distributors or retailers, they can also resort to using a method of voluntary pricing. It is a participative pricing mechanism that delegates price determination to the buyer. The seller simply offers access to the product and lets buyers decide the price they want to pay. This method comes as contradictory to basic economic principles that see people as self-interested individuals who would not pay if they are not forced to. However, evidence from academic research shows that the combination of motivating factors such as reciprocity, fairness, self-image concerns or norm conformity make this a feasible method that is not subject to market exchange norms as much as social exchange norms, explaining why it has become prevalent across creative industries in the last decades (Regner, 2015; Kim, Natter & Spann, 2009). Those who employ this strategy expect that there will be enough people who choose to pay instead of accessing the content for free so as to cover their costs or make a profit. Galuszka (2015) finds this method suitable for two types of artists, those who enjoy widespread popularity and can rely on the size of their audience, or have a small, but very devoted fan base that is able to deliver significant contributions. Arguably the most widely discussed use of a voluntary payment model was the release of the album *In Rainbows* by rock group Radiohead in 2007, but 7 years earlier the world-renown author Stephen King self-released his serial novel *The Plant*, via his own website with a voluntary option to pay one dollar for it and a note: “We have the chance to become Big Publishing's worst nightmare,” (Dubner, 2000). He later claimed that after accounting for necessary costs, he made over \$460,000 dollars of profit on the 7 books he made available (Harrison, 2001).

While the appeal of this method lies in its ability to distribute a product straight to consumers without the need to tolerate or fight piracy while still earning money, there is a caveat. As noted by Brown (2011), not putting a calculated price tag on the traded cultural product can cause consumers to lose the perception of the value of the product altogether with their willingness to pay for it.

2.8 Crowd-based means of content monetization

As previously explained, the internet enabled organizations, groups as well as individuals to address large audiences instantly at a small cost. Thanks to that, the practice of crowdsourcing, the utilization of the crowds' surplus energy, gained traction. Crowdsourcing came to its full potential online, making it increasingly easier to address undefined networks and bring together groups of differing sizes to provide services, ideas or content. Shortly after, people thought of utilizing financial surplus of the crowds (Howe, 2009).

2.8.1 Crowdfunding

Although one of the early examples of crowdfunding was the initiative of the British group Marilion, which managed to raise money for their US tour from their fans, crowdfunding in its professional form took off later with platforms such as ArtistShare, Sellaband and Kickstarter. These allowed entities to raise a previously disclosed amount of money for a proposed project, very often artistic and music-related, from a crowd by small or mid-size contributions in the form of donations or payments for goods or investments, depending on the type of crowdfunding. In the case of investment crowdfunding, the contributors actually become investors in the project and expect to regain their financial input together with some sort of profit. More importantly, reward or donation-based crowdfunding offers an audience the option to either contribute towards a financial goal without receiving anything in return or to get a reward, usually based on the size of the contribution, part of which is then used to cover the costs of the reward while the rest goes towards the whole project. If a product, a book for example, is the center of the project, it can also constitute one of the rewards, while other alternatives that are related to the book or the author are offered as cheaper options for the contributors who do not want to obtain the book itself but want to support the project (Sørensen, 2016).

The reward-based model is most commonly used in the creative industries, usually on platforms like Kickstarter or in Czechia on HitHit or Startovač. On these platforms, creators present their projects to the crowd together with a tier of rewards that people can obtain for contributions. The effort to collect money this way is limited by time and it is then described as a campaign, duration of which does not usually exceed two months (Hobbs et al., 2014). While gathering finances using social network audiences for a creative project lowers the risks for the creator, there are challenges and demands intrinsically connected

with this method. Running crowdfunding campaigns requires time capacities for administration and communication with the audience and backers and puts more demands on the creators to either manage these themselves or secure support staff. In the words of Leistert and Röhle (2014), “the so-called viral mechanisms of the net do not emerge out of the blue, but need to be stimulated and fed. One has to be active all around the clock.” On top of that, there is another downside to crowd-funding campaigns. If the campaign does not reach its financial target, as per the all-or-nothing rule, the total sum of raised money returns to the contributors leaving the campaigners without means to deliver their project.

2.8.2 Crowd-patronage

Stemming from the principles of subscription models which are typical for newspapers but have recently spread to numerous online services and rooted in the age-old system of patronage, a crowd-based alternative to a one-off income of crowdfunding, crowd-patronage introduces regular payments from the audience to the creators which gives them a more reliable stream of income and aims to liberate them in the creative process (Swords, 2017). People who are fans or followers of someone’s work can opt-in to regularly contribute, usually on a monthly basis, to their production. Furthermore, these contributions do not have to reach a certain goal and are thus more efficiently passed onto the recipient. For example Patreon, currently the largest crowd-patronage platform in the world, users can gain access to special content from the creators they financially support, and the platform takes a 5% fee of all the contributions in return. In theory, crowd-patronage is not oriented towards gaining a reward for the contribution but rather in helping the creators to continue in their work. As noted by Swords (2017), “crowd-patronage refigures relationships between artist and patron, shifting the control over what and how work is produced from patrons to artists, and allows more people to engage in funding the arts.”

2.9 Alternative revenue streams

Apart from the written content as their main offering, creators can also engage in other activities that are directly linked to their writing to open new sources of income.

2.9.1 Merchandising

Making use of the traffic on their channels, readers and fans can be approached by the creators with the offer to buy other goods that are typically related to the creator’s brand

or work. A typical representation of this branch is merchandising, a method where creators contract out a delivery of goods and items bearing the brand or other references to the work of the creator. Usually this process does not involve other intermediaries than those who are responsible for manufacturing the merchandise, and the final products can be sold via their own channels or during special occasions and events.

2.9.2 Public appearances

As mentioned in the chapter on source credibility, writing activities of creators can lead to them being perceived as experts or authorities on subjects they focus on in their work. Consequently, they often receive invitations to perform as speakers at various events, give lectures, lead workshops or even teach or host at universities and schools. While some of these public appearances are not paid and simply serve as an opportunity to promote their work and visibility, they can also be reimbursed.

Type	Monetization method	Environment	Income originator
Marketing-based	Advertisements	Online	Advertiser
	Sponsorship	Online & Offline	Sponsor
Self-publishing		Online & Offline	Audience
Direct sale via own media	Fixed price	Online	Audience
	Subscription-based model	Online	Audience
	Pay-what-you-want	Online	Audience
Crowd-based	Crowdfinancing	Online	Audience
	Crowdfpatronage	Online	Audience
Alternative revenue streams	Merchandising	Online & Offline	Audience
	Public appearances	Online & Offline	Provider/Organizer

Table 2: Overview of examined content monetization methods

3 Methodology

In this chapter, the integral parts of the research process of this thesis are presented. This includes research strategy together with the rationales behind its selection, sample and its characteristics as well as the analysis approach.

3.1 Research strategy

Since the topic of contemporary means of monetization of written content alone had been mostly untouched by academic literature globally and remained utterly novel within the boundaries of Czech Republic, this study has primarily taken the inductive approach of a qualitative research strategy. Although there were some limited expectations regarding motivations of writers outlined in the theory section (expressed through RQ4), the predominant course of action for this paper has been to describe, interpret and understand how the independent writers in Czechia monetize their content (RQ1), how their methods influence their work (RQ2), and what intermediaries they deal with (RQ3). With that in mind, a basic form of interpretative research design – the cross-sectional design – was utilized through a series of semi-structured interviews to compile unique accounts of a writer’s experience in the observed areas (Merriam, 2009; Bryman, 2016).

Following this study’s areas of interest, an initial interview guide was drafted and can be found in Appendix A. The questions were formulated to investigate the areas as outlined by the research questions with some inquiries being rather direct, as in the case of specific monetization tools. Other questions were left purposefully broader to give the interviewee space to approach the question from their own point of view, such as the questions focusing on motivations. Moreover, leading questions and a prompt gave the interviews a frame to follow while the guide was also used flexibly (e.g. deviations from the ordering of the questions or omission of already answered questions) to allow for natural discussion and interaction between the author and the interviewee. These aspects together with the follow-up questions outside of the guide intended to gain further information on specific topics, were greatly beneficial for making the interviews more casual, helping the interviewees to feel relaxed and willing to share their experience. The interview guide also contained several items that were specific to some monetization tools. Logically, if the creator did not utilize a certain tool, the corresponding questions were not asked. The number of questions per interview therefore varied from 15 to 32, depending on the number of utilized monetization

methods and the flow of the interview. Based on the dynamics and content of the first 3 interviews, the interview guide was adjusted to better meet the demands of the research. The adjusted interview guide can be found in Appendix B.

3.2 Sample

At the beginning of the sampling process, the author analyzed the media landscape and scouted for prospective participants. The profile of potential research units was given: a person earning money for independently creating original written content. In practice this meant that the writers could not be members of newspaper editorial teams, or currently have retaining deals with publishers or media houses.

The resulting sample was acquired using purposive convenience sampling. Based on the criteria, 8 creators took part while another 10 were unsuccessfully contacted. Out of the sample, several were members of the author's extended social network; some were referred to the author and the rest were approached via available contact information without having shared social links with the author. The sampling method was utilized for its obvious practical benefits, while also allowing for the selection of a mixture of writers in terms of area of focus as well as their approaches to content monetization.

3.3 Data collection

Initially, the aim was to carry out all the semi-structured interviews in person (face-to-face mode). However, due to personal, temporal and practical reasons, several interviewees expressed a preference to participate in the research via an online video call or e-mail. Furthermore, the data collection was affected by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic that resulted in two interview meetings being cancelled and had to be alternated in terms of interview mode. In order to accommodate preferences of the interviewees, a combination of different modes of semi-structured interviews was employed, consisting of face-to-face, video calls and e-mail interviews. Nevertheless, with the third type, the interviews were conducted over several e-mails, allowing the author to still react to answers given and tailor the rest of the interview accordingly. While this raises fair questions in terms of internal validity of the research, the combined method of personal, virtual and e-mail interviews allowed for greater diversity within the sample of the given population in terms of gender, domicile, utilized monetization methods together with a generally larger number of interviews.

All in all, 7 complete interviews and one partial were conducted by the author, all of them in Czech with the face-to-face interviews taking place at different locations as per the preference of the interviewees. Prior to the actual interview, the interviewees were asked for their consent to record the interview and use the contents of the interview for research purposes. They were also informed that per request, their responses can be anonymized as well as withdrawn from the research altogether. The recording of the face-to-face and video-call interviews were made using the built-in recording features of the author's smartphone device and Skype video-call software respectively and were later transcribed in verbatim. A list of interviewees and details of the interviews can be found in Appendix C and the recordings of the interviews and e-mails can be accessed through links in Appendix D.

3.4 Data Analysis

Consistent with the aim of this paper, grounded theory was used for data analysis. This research approach is commonly utilized in qualitative research to generate theoretical concepts based on the patterns emerging from gathered data (Bryman, 2016). In line with the standards of this approach, the analysis process consisted of two key parts, coding and categorizing. In this case, coding meant breaking down the interview transcripts into sections, smaller units suitable for interpretation and further analysis. During later categorization, the units were organized into thematic categories based on shared content characteristics. As prescribed by the grounded theory, the coding and categorization was an ongoing iterative process and its findings are thus a result of going back and forth within the scope of collected data. In particular, the process consisted of an initial reading of the transcripts, coding the data and looking for thematic overlaps and likeness in the content, followed by development of themes of shared meaning. To a certain extent, the structure of the interview itself outlined some of the themes within the research. However, the individual codes were developed through exploration and review of the data that lead to the final themes. Last but not least, the findings were compiled into a coherent structure appropriate for the format of the research and are presented in the following chapter.

4 Findings

The following chapter presents the principal findings of this study. These are structured according to the main areas as introduced earlier, however the included categories and their links are the core results of the data analysis. Through an interpretation and discussion of the data – views and experiences of the interviewees – here the study offers answers to the research questions.

4.1 Writing as a source of income

When addressing the issue of writing as a source of income, we must start at the feasibility of devoting time solely to writing as a living. Despite their different areas of focus, the interviewees within the sample were generally in agreement in their take on this topic. In reality, writing and publishing was not a full-time job for any of the participants at the time of the interviews. In the next section we will see how this affects and exhibits itself in the content creation. For the matter of monetization, essential information is that many of the interviewed authors declared that they considered turning writing into their single source of revenue and often went as far as doing the necessary calculations.

Interviewee 4: If we talk about fiction and standard rates and prices, you would need to sell around 40 000 books a year with a publisher, roughly 5000 books with self-publishing and own sale channels. The numbers are attainable, but it is very, very difficult and you need a considerable amount of luck – and of course – a lot of persistence, talent and perfectly mastered writing craft. There are definitely easier, and most importantly, more reliable ways to make money.

The acknowledgment of the amount and difficulties writing and publishing a book entails was also present throughout the interviews and was probably best captured in the answer from a beginner author of children's books:

Interviewee 5: Based on the single experience I have, I found out that it is a lot of work for little money.

The question of reliability of income generated from writing recurred throughout the research interviews and is shown to be one of the main motivations behind writers choosing to keep another full-time job or just refraining from writing full-time. Most of the writing and publishing activities are by nature irregular and can easily become subjects to influences of various external factors causing them to fail as a steady source of finance. This means that relying just on writing presents a challenge of dealing with uncertainty.

Interviewee 5: I had an urge to leave my job and start writing and work on the related projects I mentioned, full-time... But the concern, that I would not be able to sustain a living this way, is substantial, and I think, justified.

So although the creators repeatedly stated, that in theory they would be able to secure sufficient income just through writing itself, none of them have decided to take this path. This stance was prevalent despite the fact that in many cases the authors shared an experience of cooperating with a publisher and then switching to self-publishing. As implied in the first quote, self-publishing has the potential to generate more money thanks to substantially higher profit margins for the author. With online e-books which have considerably lower production costs, this difference becomes even more prominent.

Interviewee 6: Printed books sell more, but from the point of view of profit, the e-book is way more attractive. That's because if you are a successful author, you get 12 % from a copy of a printed book, if you are new you get 8 %. If there are more of you, you need to split that. So in the end we are talking about dozens of Czech crowns per copy. On the other hand with an e-book, I am not saying you get the whole amount, because there are still costs with publishing it... But even if you sell less of them, it is paradoxically way more attractive as an income.

In his answer, the interviewee also mentioned the proverbial magical figures of 8 and 12 percent. According to the interviewees, the local market *modus operandi* is that in the case of collaboration between an author and a publishing house, the author is left with a profit that ranges from 8 to 12 % on an issue of the book. Considering the range of possibilities we have seen in the theory section of this paper, it is thus no surprise that many authors at some point in their career decide to depart from this path and publish their own works. Especially as they gain experience in the field.

Interviewee 2: They keep it as a profit for all the services they provided. Although it does not cost you any effort, it is nice – you have published a book – but it is not that nice if you really want to make money off it. Unless you publish on a mass scale by hundreds of thousands of issues, then you are fine with 8 to 12 % on a piece and still earn beautifully.

However, the decision not to work with a publishing body was not exclusively limited to financial reasons. Very often, the authors are not even able to secure the standard deal with the publisher despite long periods of negotiation and dealing with the publishing houses.

Interviewee 1: They will turn it down right away, or they are dealing with it for three or four months, and then a problem appears: publishing schedule, 'we don't like the content', 'we don't find it profitable'. Or they just don't like it at all. The issue is that the process takes like three months until they have read and evaluated it and before you get feedback. So during a year, you can do like five publishing houses. And that is very little.

This shows another dimension of uncertainty that is an inherent part of the business for writers. In combination with the irregularity of income, not having a stable demand from a purchasing intermediary renders writing books without retaining deals or other tactics extremely volatile and quite mentally demanding.

Interviewee 4: It is not uncommon for an author to be offering a manuscript for years. I was negotiating with a publisher for half a year and went through several rounds of approvals, and then the editorial board rejected it. Now imagine that's your fifth publishing house. Seventh. Fifteenth. These situations are extremely frustrating and they deprive an author of joy from the creation.

Despite these findings, some of the interviewed authors confirmed their intention to secure deals with publishing houses for their future work, including Interviewee 1 whose quote we have read earlier. The fact that taking the traditional path of offering a manuscript to a publisher and keeping low profit margins is still attractive to many authors suggests that there are other factors at play than just financial allure. The first suspected motivation is the ease of having someone else deal with other parts of the publishing process and the intermediaries involved, giving the author the luxury to focus on the content or just the aspects they want to focus on. Another appeal of a publishing house deal is the distribution network they can provide thanks to their established relationships with distributors. In Czechia, there is a stable situation in the book distribution market with a strong market leader which has been mentioned repeatedly during this research. The findings suggest that it is generally hard for a debuting author who is not already famous to secure a deal directly with the distributor without having the support of a publisher. And even in the case of authors who can rely on their past achievements in order to sign a contract directly with a distributor, as a self-publisher, they have no leverage with bookstores to have them order their books or to display them well. That brings us to another traditional institution that has retained its stable importance in the writing-publishing chain.

Interviewee 3: Bookstores are an important channel. People often ask if they can see the book in a bookstore somewhere. So next time I will go this way as well, so it is covered and I can focus on other things.

By ‘going this way’, here interviewee 3 means cooperating with a publisher or distributor to have his next book distributed in bookstores around the country. Finally, the convenience and distribution network do not seem to be the main appeals of a traditional publishing deal. The very first interviewee captured the true attractiveness quite poignantly:

Interviewee 1: I want my next book to come out under a publishing house. I don’t mind if it is a small one. But I want it to go the official path, so that it has the hallmark. So it has the label.

This answer as well as others similar to it point to the credibility of the institution that publishing houses still enjoy. It seems that while they lost some of their influence, in terms of lowered barriers to enter the market and publish one’s own content, the traditional organizations and institutions still keep their old position as curators of content. They still represent a source of credibility which they pass onto the content, and the authors respectively. This is something that can distinguish works on the market and this is still an aspiration of authors and writers. However, as we will see later, for the general public it seems that the act of writing a book itself even through self-publishing is enough to grant the credibility of a published book author.

4.1.1 Self-publishing

We turn to self-publishing as the first monetization method since it actually precedes many of the other forms in the writing and publishing process. Following the findings from earlier, if an author does not want to or is not offered to work with a publisher, he or she can opt to self-publish their work. There are several options to choose from at this stage. First of all, there might still be a possibility of collaborating with a publisher but bearing a significant part of the costs connected with the publishing of the book.

Interviewee 1: I made a kind of a split deal, where I invested a certain amount, to publish the book, and they covered the second half of the costs, because the money I put in was not enough for publishing the edition and the work around it.

This way the author can still benefit from the infrastructure surrounding the established publishing institution. In the remaining scenarios, the author or authors need to find a way to finance their writing and publishing venture as they set on the path of self-publishing. The

advantages of this approach can be traced logically as the opposites of the characteristics of collaborating with the publisher. First and foremost, it gives the author complete autonomy. While working with a publisher gives the author space to focus on writing itself, self-publishing requires attention and capacity to address and handle other tasks involved in the process. Whereas this contributes to the author's autonomy over the content itself, it also presents a possible pitfall in the form of lack of oversight.

Interviewee 4: There is no one to advise you, no one to warn you against a fatal mistake, no one to throw you a lifeline.

The autonomy here entails both financial and creative aspects. While having complete creative freedom is appealing to many, the associated financial independency means that the authors take upon themselves all the risks of the venture. In fact, the author is pretty much paying for the autonomy and ability to create freely without having an institution involved with a financial stake in the work. How the autonomy is retained through investment is best illustrated by interviewee 1, a fiction author who had a split-deal with a publisher.

Interviewee 1: They did not interfere at all, but that was given by the fact that I carried half of the costs. If it was all on them, I am pretty sure they would have something, with the goal being to make it as accessible as possible. By investing your own resources, you are maintaining some autonomy.

However, the need to manage the entire process of producing a book while also not having much professional guidance can be quite challenging for many. Hence complete autonomy, the greatest asset of self-publishing, is also its biggest pitfall.

As testified to by the respondents who had been involved in publishing a printed book, the goal is to obtain as much money as possible prior to printing in order to limit one's own financial risks. If the creator does not possess their own means, they can look for alternatives including a possible arrangement with a distributor that is agreed upon prior to printing or employ one of the methods such as crowdfunding which have been elaborated on in the theory section. All in all, the responses in this study show that if the creators don't mind taking the riskier option of self-publishing, the monetary gain has the potential to make up for invested time and stress alongside a considerable feeling of accomplishment stemming from the fact that the author has handled the process on their own.

However, to succeed on this journey, the author needs to make many decisions regarding the book, more than just its content, and secure providers for other services such as graphics or proofreading. Here the course of action forces creators to prioritize and often,

make compromises. As mentioned earlier, the higher profit margins which are a common decisive factor for self-publishing, are naturally reduced with each and every other person or vocation involved.

Interviewee 4: If the author does not mind doing it poorly, he can arrange many things himself. And I do that very often, because anything done well costs money, and there is not a lot of it going around in fiction writing.

Furthermore, the list of necessary decisions does not stop with the involvement of intermediaries which we will address more in depth in a later chapter. There are also essential questions involving distribution of the work and the type of medium it will be distributed in. Particularly, based on their knowledge of the field and audiences, they need to decide if their works should be published as e-books, alternatively through other forms of digital release, or together with a printed version. Since the actual printing presents the dominant costs of producing a written piece, the profit margins from a purely online electronic release are more favorable for the author. Nevertheless, responses from authors in this study point to the importance and benefits of having printed books available.

Interviewee 3: It is something tangible, in physical world, from my point of view as a digital marketing specialist; I think it is important to be able to somehow present yourself in the offline world.

4.1.2 Digital release versus printed books

Interviewee 7: When I publish an e-book, I get four times as much.

Numerous factors come into play when authors select a certain medium for a written work. While the profit margins are an enormous and obvious pro when speaking about electronic books, there are naturally some cons to consider. For instance, not every genre is suitable for e-books. Cookbooks are a good example. Although there are quite a few of them available as e-books, some exclusively, a substantial part of the readership is buying the printed versions for the sheer convenience of having it at hand. In the case of cookbooks as well as children's literature, there is also the issue of selecting the type of paper as well as the different methods of print which in the end show the quality of the issue.

Interviewee 2: I could have a book that is so cheap to make, that I would be able to pay for it with sponsorship money. But because my book is more complicated, the paper is different, the binding is different, there is a cover and more and more, the book ends up being quite expensive to make.

Hence, the creators need to think about the expectations connected with the quality of the medium itself with some fields within the industry being rather demanding in this sense. Meanwhile, other genres and areas don't require special focus or investments into quality of print and can be published easily as a paperback or in the end, simply as e-books. These are thus substantially cheaper to make and in case of e-books, to distribute. As discussed in the previous chapter, printed books remain important thanks to their tangible value. In this sense, they are more than just an embodiment of the creators' work, but are also capable of representing them.

Interviewee 2: When you have the book, it is naturally another article that you can get to people, that they can buy, that can raise awareness about you. So it is an income that has the potential to grow, but at the same time it is an image thing. Meaning when your name is mentioned, people can refer to it, look at it, give it to someone.

In fact, it is sort of a link, when you don't have merchandise; it is the best option for people to buy you.

With that in mind, authors and creators spoke repeatedly about their considerations on the formats and media they use, including instances of revisiting their intentions to pick either a book or an e-book and think closely about their target audience. Regardless of the decision on the latter subject, there seems to be at least one expectation of the audience that might be inherent to books across their media.

Interviewee 3: An interesting insight is that people are still recounting price of the book against the page count. Really. It is very interesting because in the age of digital content [] if you look at some stats, e-books are 30 to 50 percent shorter than traditional printed books.

Even with the higher profit margins, the shorter e-books are usually offered for lower prices whether they are self-published or not. As a result of the lowered entry costs for publishing an e-book and in the absence of gate-keepers or curators that would filter the content, the market is exhibiting signs of content influx, which confirms the expectations of the literature review.

Interviewee 8: There are now thousands of e-books on the Czech market, and many of them are of a subprime quality. That diminishes the reputation of e-books in general. People then have distrust towards them.

Altogether, the key finding regarding the way creators pick formats for their written books lies in the level of attention that authors give to their audience, or for a lack of a better term,

their target group. If an author truly understands his or her target audience, they can select the right format and make the most of its potential through effective distribution without including the traditional intermediaries.

Interviewee 3: Yes, I have a book, here is my target group, and I just want to deliver the book to them without including all the established publishers and all of those... That is something a lot of people have figured out.

4.1.3 Direct sale via own media

For self-publishers without a distribution contract, selling their works through their self-owned channels is the easiest way. However, even according to the interviewees, who previously had had contracts with either publishers or distributors, none of the actors limited the authors in selling their works for a fixed price via their own channels such as a website or social media account. Generally, the distributor reportedly retains rights to sell printed copies, with the focus being on their own distribution network. As a part of their self-publishing venture, all of the subjects in this study have secured websites either for themselves or to represent their works. They all participated actively in the creation of the websites, and while some of them hired providers to help them with the setup, these were usually their acquaintances or friends.

Interviewee 3: I made my own website. I assessed the situation and concluded that it is a space for me, where I can differentiate from others. That is because it not common for a book to have a complex website with several pages devoted to the introduction. It is important to add that author's own websites and communication channels give creators the option to collect contact details, most notably e-mail addresses, of readers and later utilize these for marketing or other purposes such as newsletter communication, becoming a part of the array of tools for direct sale.

In spite of serving mainly as presentations of the creator, websites and pages on social media, much like the books themselves, can also be understood as an extension of the creators and their work. It is here especially that self-publishing and self-distributing creators have to inform the public, gain popularity and convince the audience to buy into their writing and publishing business by purchasing a book.

Interviewee 2: There is the popular alternative today to sell your own books online, it is very trendy. People who are trending at the moment use it, and they are selling loads of books. Those are not available in stores at all. And of course you have bigger

profit. At the same time it is a bit more work. Suddenly you have to think of all the logistics, so it is up to you to get it to people.

Interviewee 6: I recommend selling via own channels only if you are an author with an existing community or if you are able to reach a community. Otherwise it does not make much sense.

But even with an existing fanbase or community with adequate purchasing power, the process of distribution and communication demands other skills. Technical abilities, knowledge of marketing and communication and experience with distribution are not a common skill set. In spite of that, the interviewed sample exhibited impressive dedication, willingness to learn and resourcefulness in making up for their shortcomings in these areas resulting in having their own websites with built in e-commerce features and distribution channels.

This suggests that with suitable skills or by the means of an activated social network, self-distribution via one's own media a viable option.

4.1.4 Subscription based model

A special and rare type of direct sale via one's own media channels on the Czech market is the subscription based model. One of the members of the sample is then not short of a pioneer as he went further than building up a website to distribute his content as an e-book, but created a website with a paywall. There, he publishes his work on a semi-regular basis and can communicate with subscribers. His words confirm some of the expectations resulting from the previous literature review, in particular the key advantage of this method.

Interviewee 6: The advantage is that you succeed in selling the subscription, and then you have a continuous revenue stream. There is no hype like in the case of a book, where you sell the first few months, and then it goes by single units in a year.

Moreover, the community of subscribers and the channel gives the author a great opportunity to communicate with the audience directly, gaining information about them and their use of his service.

Interviewee 6: There is a trend among the readers, that they come there because of something that interests them, they buy the shortest subscription, a week-long, which is an equivalent of the e-book's price. They go through it, some will extend it for one more week, and then they might come back later in the year for something else, when

they find another interesting thing there. Then there is a group that buys it for the whole year. That's substantially more expensive than an e-book.

Though this method appears promising in a global context, the interviewee has yet to determine its feasibility in local conditions and might possibly consider revising his content strategy.

Interviewee 6: So far it is showing to be fine, but people are not used to it here. It might be too progressive. I guess it would have been more commercially successful as an e-book.

4.1.5 Crowdfunding

Although some of the writers in the sample admitted to considering using crowdfunding, especially to cover the printing costs, the majority decided not to proceed with it. The authors exhibited restraint towards the model, and even the author who utilized it explained that it was not the primary plan.

Interviewee 5: We started considering crowdfunding once we found out we would not be able to convince a publishing house to support us.

The author used it as a way to raise money for printed books when other strategies such as dealing with publishing houses or using their own finances fail; this study confirms that crowdfunding presents an opportunity of raising necessary resources as well as provides a rough probe into the market and the possible demand for the book as a product. A point which is found in the assumptions of the theory section, the all-or-nothing-rule of crowdfunding is a significant downside of the model and often leads the project creators to ask for a smaller amount of money, which might prove to be insufficient in the end with costs outside of the expected budget. In addition to that, the interviewee stressed the demands created by the need for budgeting alongside managing the crowdfunding itself and providing the rewards. On top of the drawbacks posited earlier, the interviewee mentioned the firmly set deadline for the book set as a part of the campaign as a stressor but also a catalyst for action.

Interviewee 5: It was necessary to meet the deadline we promised to our backers, so we ended up being pressed for time. However, that was a source of energy for us to finish the book in time.

4.1.6 Merchandising

Similar to printed books, merchandise was discussed in the interviews as a physical extension of the creator's brand as well as the content of their works. However, only one of the writers engaged in a systematic sale of their own merchandise.

Interviewee 4: It is fundamental that I can offer my fans something that will make them happy, something of quality, made locally and at the same time, something they can't get themselves for an appropriate price.

According to the interviewee in question, merchandising plays a role of supporting good for his books and is being received well by the readers. Other participants stated they had considered launching their own lines of merchandise as well, but had not proceeded yet citing the need to deal with other providers and invest time in order to deliver merchandise of desired quality as the main obstacles.

4.1.7 Public appearances and consulting

The data in this study suggest that the opportunities to earn money from alternative activities relating to the area of interest of the author are unevenly distributed across the spectrum of the different domains. Therefore, whilst one fiction writer in the sample set has a career in teaching creative writing, the remaining fictionists held jobs only partially related to their craft. The non-fiction writers with their specialization and know-how in their respective fields confirmed that they were in demand to make appearances, and give lectures and workshops.

Interviewee 6: The gain with these marketing or self-development books is not from the sale of the books, it is from all the associated business. When you have courses, workshops or are invited to speak at conferences. Of course, there is significantly more money coming from that than from a book.

Interviewee 3: The way I see it, the book started something very personal for me. Like trying to go this way as a consultant, presenter, expert of some sort. People just like it.

The lecturer on creative writing also had a bit of an advantage to his job in comparison to the others. The reason is that when authors aim to support their writing career with paid public appearances or consulting related to their area of writing expertise, they commonly face a certain level of uncertainty as these streams are also of an irregular nature, both in terms of frequency and amount.

Interviewee 2: There are a number of one-time things, when someone invites me to perform somewhere. [] These are activities that come around during the year. I might not know about any of them in January, and I might have seven of them scheduled in February. In the end, these will bring in more money during summer months than the book from the whole year.

The perils of this practice turned into real difficulties just during the time of writing of this paper. In light of the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, the Czech government has banned all public gatherings for several weeks, resulting in cancellation or rescheduling of many events. This greatly affected the anticipated incomes of some participants in this study.

4.1.8 Marketing based methods

There was a weak presence of marketing-based monetization methods in the sample. Naturally, there are limitations to employing sponsorships or advertisements by fiction writers, however thanks to the data provided by authors from other fields, there are still valuable lessons to be learned. Most importantly, the interviews showed that partnership deals are not exclusively limited to money or financial rewards. A practice of barter deals or other partnerships where the performance of the contract takes other forms apart from monetary is also common. These include thematic partnerships for children's book or provision of services such as content consulting or support for some of the necessary operations like photography in the case of cookbooks. The insight from the cookbook industry provided by Interviewee 2 sheds more light on the state of sponsorships in this area.

Interviewee 2: There are quite a few potential partners that approach us, but it is not necessarily connected to a book, but they are looking for an association with me. And we offer them the opportunity to partake in the book. So they will make some contribution and I will oblige them.

The partaking in the book can be arranged in many ways and is commonly based on a case-by-case approach with each deal having its own characteristics which are a combination of the nature of the book, the field or area of focus or the interest of the advertiser/partner. Still, when prearranged and planned, sponsorships can be an efficient source of funding for the crucial printing costs. Interestingly enough, the investment into advertising space alone might just be a first step for some sponsors, as they purchase part of the issue for their own corporate purposes.

Interviewee 2: Some of the partners that were mentioned in the book also bought part of an edition for their clients and partners.

The next chapter focuses on the ways aforementioned monetization methods influence content creation itself. The marketing-based approaches were prime suspects in this area with previously raised doubts on account of the possible influence of advertisers on the content. That makes it an obvious choice to open the topic of monetization and content creation.

4.2 Monetization and content creation

Tying up the previous and present chapter, the data from this study suggest that an expectation to directly influence content of some sponsored works might exist in the field.

Interviewee 2: Loads of companies had some – so to say – distasteful ideas of how the sponsorship deal and its performance should look like. [] Those were rather insensitive. We tried our best not to do just that. And so we turned many offers down, and the eventual partnerships were being negotiated for quite some time.

The interviewed cookbook author however repeatedly stated that by carefully picking and selecting partners based on shared values and approach to the work, he and his team were able to reach deals where both parties were satisfied. This was achieved without any further interference of the advertisers. Ultimately this was also a personal aim of the writer.

Interviewee 2: Nobody wanted us to write something. If we were to put in something word-by-word according to them, we would not even take such a deal.

Although marketing-based monetization methods have the potential to actually limit the absolute levels of creative freedom a self-publishing author enjoys, at the end of the day the data shows it is the creative freedom that is the foremost quality of writing for the authors in this study. The pattern of leaving monetary motives behind will be revisited in the last part of the findings section.

Interviewee 2: There is no single model that would state how it works, like here is 50 000 and we want to be in the book, we want our logo there, we want three of our products there. It is more like putting pieces together.

Looking at content creation and methods of monetization in general, all the interviewees had other employments or income sources, so their content creation was in most cases subjected to time limitations. Despite that, two approaches to the writing process emerged from the interviews – one being steady, regular writing sessions lasting for 1-2 hours a day, another

being an intensive writing period of a few weeks, usually connected with an impending deadline.

Interviewee 3: It is important to make a session of some sort that lasts 2 to 3 hours and helps to get into a flow state. That works.

Interviewee 2: When you are making a book, then you have to put everything else aside. Then you are solely focusing on the book for several months.

These approaches can also be disrupted by obstacles including the infamous writer's block and other challenges such as lack of motivation or attention.

Interviewee 1: Look, writing a book, if you really want it, you can make it in three months. If not, a year, year and a half. But in the end it will somehow turn out. Considering my situation, that I am not being pushed by anything, it is not my source of income, I don't have the urge to give it one hundred percent. I can do it as a hobby, a side project, and try other things while at it.

Finally, considering other work duties or obligations, finding time to write and create is shown to be a matter of prioritizing based on one's own experience and knowledge of their working style and habits.

Interviewee 4: Writing is above all a hobby to me, so work, family, house and other things take the priority. I am not one of the obsessed authors who sit down with the manuscript for an hour in the morning and then they suddenly find out that outside, Wednesday has gone dark.

For others, the process of writing was seen as more consuming and being employed at the same time was thus logically seen as unfavorable.

Interviewee 5: I was fairly obsessed with the work on the book at the time. I can't really do things halfway. Because of that, I am really not successful in combining the two activities now when I work on the sequel while I have my job.

On the other hand, the participants were consistent in pointing out that writing itself, the emblematic part of a writer's job, is just a mere share of the whole process of producing a book.

Interviewee 5: I was often taken by surprise that many of the tasks and works were more complicated and time-demanding than expected.

During a time of writing, the content creation is accompanied by ongoing mental engagement in the development of the story or the content. This in turn creates more demands, both mental and temporal, on the authors. Therefore, we can conclude that for the

majority of the creators in this research, content creation is somehow partially reliant on sufficient creative resources, be it inspiration, energy or willpower.

Interviewee 6: If I were to just write, I would just be all theory. But to get the knowledge, I need to work in the field. When I have my own venture and try the things, then I can write based on that. [...] I think that only authors of imagination-based literature can afford to write full time. You can't do it with science and expert literature. There you need to gain knowledge, and to get the knowledge takes more time than to write it down.

Furthermore, there are also limitations to the longevity of books as products. In the case of published books, this means that after units of years, sales of the book drop tremendously as the target group has either bought the book already or opted not to. With e-books, according to the interviewees in this study, the sales are directly linked to the digital release, and the majority of purchases are done during the first immediate days. With such temporal affordances for books as products it is thus challenging to turn content creation into an ongoing activity of content production what would serve as a sufficient income stream without being subjected to seasonality or intensity.

When talking about their approach to content creation, the interviewed authors exhibited a common affinity for a strategic approach towards their writing and audience. Across the interviews, authors have expressed and described how much care and thought go into creating their content, having the interests and characteristics of their target audience in mind.

Interviewee 4: Anyone can write a book, but what if it doesn't speak to the target audience? Someone has to pull the emergency cord on me in time.

Those with a marketing background stressed the importance of having pre-defined or well-understood target groups before setting out to write a book, no matter the area of interest.

Interviewee 3: I consider that to be the core of any publication, a target group. That is incredibly hard to determine at the beginning. [] and it is extremely important. If you don't define your target group well, then it is hard to promote, and it is obviously important for the promotion that the book and the target group are in line.

However, even the authors without a marketing specialization understood the importance of having a set target group and made it clear they develop content with their target audience in mind.

Interviewee 2: The sales are not bad, it is attractive, but there are so many books these days. Even in comparison to a few years back. Then there are authors who are really in, and they sell a huge number of books. Within this model, writing itself would not support me. Luckily, I have a group of people who like what I do.

Moreover, the discussions often touched on the subject of empathizing with the readers and audiences, and the attempts to understand their tastes and interests in order to create and deliver a work that would be in demand.

Interviewee 5: I believed that there will be a demand for such stories among the readers. And I was right.

To a big extent the creators rely on external information to better understand their audiences. Some information, in the form of feedback or advice, can be gained from involving intermediaries such as proofreaders or editors. But especially in the case of self-publishers, who only employ proofreaders with a focus on language, valuable insights from a third party can be missing. The authors demanded a need for better, more complex and constructive feedback.

Interviewee 3: I think that is the most severe difficulty. Really. To get relevant feedback on the quality of something is so unbelievably hard. [] It has taken over a year before some valuable feedback got to me, before I met people who actually told me what is what.

Even though the prevailing state was a lack of quality feedback, each and every respondent received feedback of some sort. Few claimed they have actively taken it into account for their future writing.

Interviewee 4: I think about how relevant the feedback is, and I try to figure out if I can draw something from it. Sometimes you can, sometimes you can't, but every time I am extremely happy that it was worth it for someone to sit down and to send the message.

Today, feedback is largely transmitted digitally and through social media channels. Confirming the position taken in the theory section, these tools are allowing self-dependent authors to be in touch with their fans, readers and audiences in a very cost-efficient way. They allow authors to reach and communicate information about themselves, their works or even their creative process. When it comes to gaining sound feedback that could help the creator better develop their craft or works, social media is mostly failing as a source of insightful feedback.

Interviewee 1: Some people reach out to me on Facebook, but that is not really feedback, more like notes.

Finally, the reoccurring subject of marketing tactics and approaches once again shows how authors need to consider aspects outside the actual writing.

Interviewee 4: Writing a book is actually the smaller and easier part.

To tackle these, it is often necessary even in the case of self-publishers, to introduce other players into the process. The following chapter focuses on these intermediaries and delves further into the matter.

4.3 Intermediaries

As was addressed earlier, there are a number of other various tasks that are part of producing a written work apart from content creation. Duties such as proofreading, graphic design, desktop publishing or marketing often require special skills and experience. The involvement of specialists and other people, intermediaries who stand in the process in between writing a book and the book seeing the light of the day, is another item on the list of costs that the author needs to consider in their budget and financial planning. In Table 3, the overview of intermediaries as reported by the interviewed creators of written content can be seen. On the topic of intermediaries and their work, the creators in the study declared that given the resources in the industry, they have gone to great lengths to minimize the number of involved intermediaries, sometimes at the cost of quality.

Interviewee 4: If I could leave someone out, I would have done it already. On the contrary, I have to resist the urge to widen the numbers.

According to the interviewees who touched upon the subject, disintermediation is actually attainable in the industry, at least to a certain extent. Specifically, the process of writing and publishing content in Czechia can be optimized from the point of view of the creator so that a number of intermediaries are left out without substitution or replaced partially by new intermediaries that provide a less costly solution to their function in the process. For example, self-distribution allows authors to build up their own system and network for physical distribution of the issues.

Interviewee 2: At the end of the day, they will also pay some delivery service with a warehouse, where the books are. There is someone there doing it. They basically just wrap it up and send the orders right away. So you would still pay a minor part of the

profit for the delivery services, but compared to what the distributor takes, it is units of percent's for doing the same job.

In the case of parcels, transport and deliveries, the authors have utilized several solutions ranging from unwritten agreements with local post offices, to deals with nationwide delivery services. These solutions for delivery and payments bring around intermediaries of supporting staff from the providing companies or organizations that help the creators handle this aspect, and once again, testify to the resourcefulness of the creators in the study.

By and large the answers of the respondents suggest that when cooperating with other professions on the project, creators who manage these individual tasks shift into almost a directorial role as they are aware of the vision as a whole and need to coordinate several actors in making it happen. In combination with the economic aspects of the job covered in the previous chapters, the managerial as well as technical demands of the intermediary work once again show that the job requirements of an independent writer greatly exceed writing. In combination with the preceding evidence, this confirms the worker type evolution of the roles of creators of written content in the new digital economy as discussed in the theory section.

Interviewee 1: I did it all by myself in a way that ideally it would pay for itself. But it is quite precarious.

Some of the respondents also assigned importance to or traced their interest in the writing endeavor to their previous experience working in the field or having a network of people connected to writing and publishing. Although these could be seen as fitting predispositions to enter the publishing business, in general the lack of contacts or know-how does not seem to present an obstacle in entering the business. The past experiences of the creators reveal that once they found the first person operating in the field, it became progressively easier to gain relevant contacts and people through referrals. Still, the significance of networking and social links in the context of the intermediary works might actually stretch even further. Throughout the research, authors told stories about how both friends and professional intermediaries who did their work as a living at some point helped them by providing services without asking for reimbursement.

Interviewee 5: I was surprised that we have managed to find a lot of people who became so enthusiastic just from our idea, that they were willing to help us voluntarily, without expecting a profit of any kind in return.

Together with the testimonies in the research, this admirable phenomenon points to the overall lack of funding within this field. In line with those findings, an issue that was given a disproportionate amount of space throughout the interviews was marketing. To be more precise, discussing budget decisions that determine which intermediaries are involved and which are left out, the creators generally prioritized other tasks over marketing in order to cut costs. Nevertheless, many of them agreed that the lack of resources is exhibiting in this area extensively.

Interviewee 5: I guess we foolishly thought that a nice book would market itself. And there would soon have to be another issue with more copies that would lead to more profit... We had plenty of positive feedback and we have not encountered anyone who had bought it and did not like it... But still, we have underestimated marketing and promotion of the book. We found out it is our weakness and we don't know how to scale it.

Intermediaries who can help writers advance their works include both marketing specialists who can promote their work as well as representatives of companies who are potential sponsors and can thus take a financial stake in their work and participate in marketing and promotion as well. There was a strong agreement among the writers in the study on the importance of differentiation in the market, which does relate to content creation and consideration of target audience as discussed earlier, however even with these concepts addressed, the participants indicated that further focus needs to be devoted to marketing tactics in later stages of the process as well.

Interviewee 6: Well and then you need to know how to sell it. You need a marketer, if you are not one yourself. It is great if you write a book, but if you can't sell it...

Outside of the expected intermediaries which is based on the prior literature review another kind of intermediary emerged from the research, although scarcely. In the event of a book becoming successful enough in local terms, opportunities for market expansion open up. However, for a book to cross borders from Czech Republic, a translation is needed which brings in translators, language specialists and foreign publishers and distributors into the mix. According to the interviewed writers, in this situation having support or cooperating with local publishers is necessary. Moreover, the creators felt that books published together with publisher locally have better chances in getting translated thanks to the existing international relations among the publishers.

Interviewee 7: The huge advantage is they have pushed me through all the way to the book being translated into three languages. That is something I would have not been able to do.

To sum up this chapter, it is common to talk about writing as a craft, and this metaphor naturally also made its way into the responses in this study. While we can think of writing itself as a craft, written works much like goods are created not only with writing, but it is often necessary for other players in the publishing industry to add in their expertise in order to deliver a book. The work of these intermediaries however, remains to some level invisible, even if it is often substituted with more effort from the author. It still does present substantial costs and therefore a vital part of the business.

Table 3: Overview of examined content monetization methods outside of cooperation with publishing institution

Type	Monetization method	Environment	Income originator	Intermediary type	Intermediary
Self-publishing		Online & Offline	Audience	Service provider	Illustrator, Beta-reader, Proofreader, Graphic, Editor, Printing staff, Delivery service staff or Distributor
Marketing-based	Advertisements & Sponsorships	Online & Offline	Advertiser / Sponsor	Service provider	S/A
				Contributor	Marketing staff
Direct sale via own media	Fixed price	Online	Audience	Service provider	Website administrator, Website provider, Payment solution provider staff & S/A
	Subscription-based model	Online	Audience	Service provider	Website administrator, Website provider, Payment solution provider staff & Illustrator, Beta-reader, Proofreader, Graphic, Editor
Crowd-based	Crowdfinancing	Online	Audience	Contributor	Backers
				Service provider	Crowdfunding platform staff & Same as Self-Publishing
Alternative revenue streams	Merchandising	Online & Offline	Audience	Service provider	Designer, Merchandising provider, Delivery service staff, Payment solution provider staff
	Public appearances	Online & Offline	Provider/Organiser	Contributor	Provider, Various providing staff

4.4 Motivations and rewards

Interviewee 1: It is definitely a desire to tell stories. An urge to put the story together and to communicate something, an artistic expression more than any business idea.

The interviews conducted during this study have yielded plenty of remarkable quotes on the subject of motivations for writing. Generally, the interviewed writers were already aware of their motivations that lead them to write prior to the interview and did not stall or think for long while answering the corresponding questions. Considering the numerous difficulties and obstacles they regularly encounter and need to overcome for their works to be successfully released, it is only logical that the authors are aware of their inner motivations that keep them going through this process. Furthermore, the data in this research suggest that through the process of writing, they often engage in extensive self-reflection and self-observation.

Interviewee 3: It is a smashing personal development. A book gives you so much. I did not even expect that. I knew it was important to me, but I did not expect how much. When you finish it, and then you go public with it, and wait for the responses... And you check whether you are at least a little good, or just bad at it.

Although the creators did not cite self-development as a goal to achieve through writing, they have mentioned it as a common side-effect. The intention to learn more about certain subjects while covering them came up repeatedly which can be seen as an indirect desire for self-improvement through writing. Aside from being driven by curiosity towards the subjects of writing, several respondents reported that they felt intrigued by the process of writing and publishing itself.

Interviewee 5: At the time when we decided to publish the book, it was mostly an attempt, to see if we can make it, to see if the kids will like it. Maybe somewhere in the back was a spark of hope, that the book would become so popular that it might bring along a possibility of further or bigger gains.

Especially in the cases of their first publications, authors often talked about different motives and goals than in the subsequent works. Apart from curiosity, the initial motivations included desire to fulfill their dream and be challenged. Meanwhile, with the later works their motivations shifted towards quality as well as business oriented goals.

Interviewee 3: I don't see it as a business. I know there are overlaps and synergies. [...] I had planned it as a test, and if it works out, let's go all in.

There seems to be a shift in motivations as the writers progress in their careers, as they either strive to professionalize their activities, or rethink their future presence in the field.

Interviewee 5: Finding motivation is more complicated now. It is not a challenge of trying something new anymore. Neither is extra income after the previous experience. At the present moment, the biggest motivation for me is to please our readers.

Arguably one of the most important implications from the study is that across the interviews we can observe a striking sidelining of monetary motivations for writing. No matter the area of focus or amount of experience, in light of their knowledge of the industry, the authors' answers aligned to reveal that monetary gains did not serve as primary motives for them to create.

Interviewee 2: Even though I know how to probably write a book that would be successful and had an enormous reach, that would not be me. That's just something I don't want to do. I prefer to do something for a smaller audience, this way I enjoy it and it comes natural to me.

Interviewee 4: Sure, I am trying different ways to monetize it. It would be stupid if I didn't. But that is in no way the priority. If the point was to make money, there would be nothing easier than to churn out one sequel after another of my most successful series while flooding my fans with merchandising, and hiding all available content behind a paywall. But I would find no joy in that.

The interviewed authors did not underplay the importance of considering financial aspects of their work and were generally very open in discussing actual figures and financial performance of their publications. Yet, they all independently exhibited conviction that money was not the driving motivation to write.

Interviewee 1: It is surely important to think about the financial part of it, because the time investment is enormous, and when you crawl out of it totally beaten up because you did not make any money, or you might have even lost money, that leaves you extremely demotivated. So there must be an outlook of a profit.

In a similar manner to acknowledging the importance of finance in the writing and publishing ventures, the authors supported the idea that becoming an author of a book or publication can positively benefit one's reputation.

Interviewee 3: It helps tremendously with these things. It is almost comical. 'Oh you have written a book, well then you must be an expert.' People do put an equal sign between these things.

The recognition authors of books seem to enjoy based on their published works is yet another signal of enduring credibility of institutions, here the institution being authorship itself. Although we have seen the entry barriers for publishing a book have lowered to a level where anyone can instantly release an e-book online without approval of any gatekeeper, the mere act of writing on a particular subject serves as an indicator for the public that the individual has some expertise in the area he or she writes about.

Interviewee 6: A book is still simply a prestigious matter in the eyes of people. I remember when I started... basically my main income from the book was not the royalty, but the image one gains from it.

On top of enhancing personal image, the additional value in the form of being recognized as an expert also has the potential to open new sources of revenue. The status of an author opens new opportunities, especially for authors of expert books.

Interviewee 3: The way I see it, the book started something personal for me. Trying to go in this exact direction of being a consultant, a presenter, expert of some sort. People just like it.

To conclude, while there was a strong line of evidence supporting the way intrinsic motivations lead authors to create (Mode A), the postulated externally motivated succession of earning monetary rewards via a deliberate gain of expert status through writing a book (Mode B) was not detected in this research.

5 Conclusions

This thesis has delved into the topic of independent writing and publishing in Czechia. The main goal was to set theoretical grounds on how local creators monetize their written content (RQ1), how their monetization methods influence their work (RQ2), what intermediaries they deal with along the way (RQ3) and map their underlying motivations (RQ4). In line with grounded theory approach, several themes emerged from this study and are thus granted attention for their potential to serve as theoretical concepts.

Addressing the first research question, the sample of respondents exhibited a high degree of *resourcefulness* in such that in their practice, the creators commonly utilized several monetization methods at once, or have previously experimented with other alternatives or kept other jobs simultaneously. Likewise, in the course of their independent enterprise, they exerted significant efforts to minimize the number of intermediaries in the process of producing a book in order to maximize their profit margins. Their efforts and capabilities spreading over job areas and skillsets confirm the progress of their role in the new digital economy. In this sense, the range of responsibilities of a creator of written content has outgrown the former limited focus on writing to include other activities along the way, creating a new type of worker, an independent creator in the digital era.

In spite of their economically rational behavior patterns, the sample leaned heavily towards *intrinsic underlying motivations* when it came to writing. The writers were very much aware of the financial aspects of their dealings, but put their inner motivations ahead of any rewards. That being said, they generally recognized the existence of further avenues for rewards that are associated with becoming a published author or being a writer with a focus on a particular subject.

The drive provided by intrinsic motivations appears to be crucial for overcoming a omnipresent sense of *uncertainty that stems from the irregularity and seasonality* that is inherent to the writing profession. Although the creators interviewed in this study see themselves as independent, they do not exist outside of the traditional publishing and media structures. Their work is connected with their appearances in other media platforms and the number of factors that come into play and of which are outside of a creator's control turns writing ventures into an unstable vocation.

On the other hand, thanks to modern monetization methods and approaches that enable writers to gain and keep independent status, they enjoy *immense creative freedom*. Unless

they deliberately seek other people's perspectives on content of their works, the authors don't have to deal with interferences to their creative process. In practice this does however inevitably lead to a general shortage of feedback, often leaving writers without valuable insights and other opinions on their work. In their answers the respondents also represented various approaches to content creation. And although they have also used a number of different monetization methods, no respondents viewed the methods or tools as restrictive or intrusive in relation to content creation, with only crowdfunding showing some signs of temporal creative limitations.

On the account of individual monetization methods covered in the interviews, this research has mostly confirmed the expectations from the prior literature review. The initial reconnaissance of the local media landscape as well as the interviews suggests that various progressive monetization methods such as crowd-patronage, or pay-what-you-want model's for direct sale of own media are barely utilized in the country. All things considered, the tools and means used by independent creators are very close in nature to tools used by modern media institutions, suggesting that the main shift lies in the willingness to exert effort to minimize the influence of intermediaries and gain responsibility for financial success of their own works. And although it is seen as possible, from the point of view of an independent creator, a *greater disintermediation* is *not desirable*. While omission of institutional actors such as publishers or distributors can be cost-efficient and when handled correctly, can yield greater profits, the remaining professions that are firmly part of the publishing process remain indispensable. Since the sum of the number of intermediaries increases with the growing professionalism of a writer, its reduction is thus counterproductive to efforts of delivering high quality work in all aspects.

Arguably the most significant implication of this research lies in the detection of *persisting credibility of institutions and actors*. From the audience's perception through networking effects within the industry to intentions of authors themselves, this research has found evidence pointing to the prevailing importance of traditional intermediaries, especially publishing houses and distributors. The entities in question continue to enjoy recognition and status of authority, and subsequently retain their functions and roles even in the era of digital media and industrial re-intermediation as described in the theory section. Similarly, regardless of its form and circumstance of origin, authorship of a book or publication is still seen as a prestigious matter with the *tendency to enhance a writer's perceived expertise*. This phenomenon seems to persist even though this study has confirmed that starting one's

own publishing activities is recognized as relatively easy due to the decreased barriers in terms of gatekeeping and monetary demands to enter the business.

5.1 Limitations and further research

The current study has several limitations that need to be recognized. Primarily, although it included respondents from a range of backgrounds, due to its size and being devoid of randomization, the sample is at best representative of the subgroup of independent writers in Czechia and the results then cannot be generalized. In accordance with the original aim of the research, the sample has provided initial theoretical grounds for further inquiries into the topic on a local level. Nonetheless, the pioneering character of this study came hand in hand with wide thematic focus. Future possible scholarships on the subject should take a narrower approach and further develop the revealed concepts.

In addition, the set of monetization methods available to contemporary creators was not exhaustively covered in the scope of the sample and the analysis respectively. For instance, there are currently no local crowd-patronage platforms in Czechia. The number of individuals that utilize crowd-patronage via the global leader Patreon.com in the country is limited to units and during the time of this study, a mere one creator active on Patreon actually fit the profile of the participant of this study. This creator was contacted however unsuccessfully. The relative novelty of this method together with its recent surge on the global scene as depicted in the theory section suggest it has yet to be developed on a local level in the country. In the meantime, the absence of this method, as well as pay-what-you-want approach's or blogger participants, is yet another shortcoming of this thesis. Hence, a more comprehensive coverage of the individual methods and their comparison, which could serve as a base for a typology, is a desirable outcome of further research.

Last but not least, this paper focused on the tools and means of monetization together with their impacts and did not follow the possible role of formats in the process. Since the results here suggest that at least in the eyes of the audience, formats of written works carry with them a multitude of affordances, it would be interesting to see more investigation done in that area.

Summary

This study used qualitative research strategy by conducting 7 semi-structured interviews with independent writers in Czechia and subsequently analyzing the collected data via grounded theory. The main goal was to set theoretical grounds through answers to four research questions, namely how local creators monetize their written content, how their monetization methods influence their work, what intermediaries are they dealing with along the way, and what are their underlying motivations for writing and publishing. Using concepts of cultural intermediaries and borrowing from theories on source credibility to investigate motivations for writing, this study introduced the reader to history, processes and players in the fields of writing and publishing together with contemporary means and methods for monetization. In line with grounded theory approach, several themes emerged from the research part of this study. Investigating the individual approaches of writers to monetization and content creation, the paper looked for possible influences of the utilized methods on actual writing. However, despite the various tools touched upon in the interviews, majority showed no limitations or characteristics that would affect writing itself. Regarding the monetization methods and writing ventures, on many occasions the interviewed authors showed high degree of resourcefulness in their activities confirming the theoretical expectation of role shift of writer in the new digital economy to a more complex and demanding role of digital creator. These creators then need to overcome noticeable levels of uncertainty on numerous occasions, and although they reported being mainly driven by intrinsic factors and aspects of their activities, they often retained other jobs or vocations to tackle the innate volatility of the profession. Bringing in the theoretical concepts of disintermediation and re-intermediation, this findings of this thesis suggest that while the former seems to be achievable, even according to the creators themselves who have to consider inclusion of intermediaries at their own costs, more extensive disintermediation is not desirable in order to sustain quality of works in the field. Last but not least, the traditional intermediaries as well as institutions in the field seems to enjoy a persisting credibility and thus retain their function.

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Master's Thesis Proposal Form

SCHVÁLENO *MJ*, 19.8.19

Institut komunikačních studií a žurnalistiky FSV UK Teze MAGISTERSKÉ diplomové práce									
LETO ČÁST VYPLŇUJE STUDENTKA:									
Příjmení a jméno diplomantky/diplomanta: Adam Romaňák	Razítko podatelny: <table border="1"> <tr> <td colspan="2"> Univerzita Karlova Fakulta sociálních věd </td> </tr> <tr> <td> Došlo dne: </td> <td> - 7 - 08 - 2019 - 1 - </td> </tr> <tr> <td> Číslo: </td> <td> 424 </td> </tr> <tr> <td> Přijato: </td> <td> _____ </td> </tr> </table>	Univerzita Karlova Fakulta sociálních věd		Došlo dne:	- 7 - 08 - 2019 - 1 -	Číslo:	424	Přijato:	_____
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Matrículační ročník diplomantky/diplomanta: 2017/2018									
E-mail diplomantky/diplomanta: 98232271@fsv.cuni.cz									
Studijní obor/forma studia: Media studies									
Předpokládaný název práce v češtině: Nástroje přímé monetizace pro autory textových obsahů v České republice									
Předpokládaný název práce v angličtině: Means of direct content monetization for creators of written content in Czech Republic									
Předpokládaný termín dokončení Summe: term 2019/2020									
Charakteristika tématu a jeho dosavadní zpracování (max. 1800 znaků): Among the many changes in media landscape brought about by the rise of the Internet, the options for content distribution and monetization have created new ways for the consumers and fans to engage with the authors of their favored contents. These means for direct content monetization such as crowdfunding, crowd-patronage or subscriber crowdfunding allow the creators to work independently or turn their production into source of income and further develop the relations with their audiences. Furthermore, the platforms providing the services for monetization of contents serve as media themselves. The existing research has focused mostly on the consumers, pricing strategies and the modes of monetization and distribution itself. However, the perspective of the creators as well as the role in the media landscape in Czech Republic is yet to be extensively covered. Furthermore, no research has previously explored what are the practices and content-related implications of the direct monetization of written contents in the Czech Republic.									
Předpokládaný cíl práce, případně formulace problému, výzkumné otázky nebo hypotézy (max. 1800 znaků): Due to the extremely limited literature on the topic, the main goal of the thesis is to explore and describe how the local Czech creators make the use of the different means for direct content monetization in both local and international platforms, what these platforms are and how they function and operate in the Czech media landscape and what are the implications and consequences for their practice of content creation. To meet the demands of the exploratory research into the matter, qualitative research is chosen as the research strategy.									
Předpokládaná struktura práce (rozdělení do jednotlivých kapitol a podkapitol se stručnou charakteristikou jejich obsahu): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction 2. Changes in content distribution and monetization 3. Means of direct content monetization 4. Implications of practice of independent written content creation 5. Methodology 6. Data analysis 7. Conclusion and discussion 									

Vymezení podkladového materiálu (papír, titul periodika a analyzované období):
In-depth, semi-structured interviews with Czech creators utilizing various means of direct content organization.

Metody (techniky) zpracování materiálu:
Transcription, data organization and coding, analysis utilizing grounded theory method.

Základní literatura (nejméně 5 nejdůležitějších zdrojů klíčnými a metodě jeho zpracování; u všech titulů je nutné uvést stručnou anotaci na 2-5 řádků):

BOOTH, Paul. 2014. Crowdfunding: A Spinnaker application of digital fandom. *New Media & Society* [online]. B.m.: SAGE Publications, 17(2), 149-166. Available at: doi:10.1177/1461444814558907

The digital environment has opened up new spaces for fans to engage with the production process of their favoured texts. However, fan studies have largely neglected the larger temporal structures undergirding this engagement. In this article, I augment studies of digital fandom by utilizing Bruce Sterling's technosocial concept of the Spine as a means of investigating the relationship forged between the technology of crowdfunding and the affect of particular audiences.

BROWN, Steven C., 2011. Artist autonomy in a digital era: the case of Nine Inch Nails. *Empirical Musicology Review* [online]. B.m.: The Ohio State University Libraries, 6(4), 198-213. Available at: doi:10.18061/1811/52949

The article provides a comprehensive timeline of the band in question circa 2005-2010, evaluating the success of the distribution methods employed in accordance with Masnick's proposed business model of connecting with fans and providing them with a reason to buy. Implications are discussed concerning the applicability of the model for new and emerging bands.

GALUSZKA, Patryk, 2014. New Economy of Fandom. *Popular Music and Society* [online]. Bm: Informa UK Limited, 35(1), 25-43. Available at: doi:10.1080/03607766.2014.974325

This article discusses five new roles that fans can play: sponsors, co-creators of value, stakeholders, investors, and filters. These roles are elements of new types of relationship between fans and artists, which are manifestations of the emergence of what can be called a "new economy of fandom." The article argues that concepts of value co-creation, and "prosumption" may help explain the ongoing changes.

TOWSE, RUTH and HANDEKE, CHRISTIAN, 2013. *Handbook on the digital creative economy*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Pub. Ltd. ISBN 9781781004876

Digital technologies have transformed the way many creative works are generated, disseminated and used. They have made cultural products more accessible, challenged established business models and the copyright system, and blurred the boundary between producers and consumers. This unique resource presents an up-to-date overview of academic research on the impact of digitization in the creative sector of the economy.

MAK, Vincent, Rami ZWICK, Akshay R. RAO a Jake A. PATTARATANAKUN, 2015. "Pay what you want" as threshold public good provision. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* [online]. B.m.: Elsevier BV, 127, 30-43. Available at: doi:10.1016/j.obhdp.2014.11.004

Offers a different perspective on Pay what-you-want pricing by demonstrating

that, if the seller and consumers interact repeatedly, and future provision of PWYW depends on whether current revenue under PWYW is sufficient for the seller to achieve financial goals, then paying under PWYW can be likened to paying for a threshold public good. Presenting a model implying that continuous provision of PWYW can be profitable even when all consumers are self-interested.

SWORDS, Jon. 2017. Crowd-patronage: Intermediaries, geographies and relationships in patronage networks. *Poetics* [online]. B.n.: Elsevier BV. 64. 63-73. Available at: doi:10.1016/j.poetic.2017.09.001

This article introduces a new mode of patronage of the arts: crowd-patronage. In so doing the article illustrates the plural roles of intermediaries in patronage networks which go beyond Bourdieusian cultural intermediaries to include regulatory and financial actors. A brief history of patronage is presented which outlines different modes and eras of patronage for the arts since the 12th century. These themes then structure the analysis of crowd-patronage through a case study of the patronage platform Patreon in the remainder of the paper.

Diplomové a disertační práce k tématu (seznam bakalářských, magisterských a doktorských prací, které byly k tématu obhájeny na UK, případně dalších obdobně blízkých fakultách či vysokých školách za posledních pět let)

SEDLÁČEK, Jakub. *The Rise of the YouTube Celebrity: The Migration of Young Audiences from TV to Independent Content Creators* [online]. 2015. Master's thesis. Univerzita Karlova, Filozofická fakulta, Ústav informačních studií – studia nových médií. Vedoucí práce Mgr. Michala Buchova. Dostupné z: <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/download/120240856/?lang=cs>

VEJSKALOVÁ, Tereza. *Crowdfunding jako možnost financování kulturních projektů v podmínkách České republiky* [online]. 2017. Master's thesis. Vysoká škola ekonomická v Praze, Fakulta podnikohospodářská, Katedra podnikání. Available at: <https://vsekv.vse.cz/id/1333332>

HODBOŇ, Vojtěch. *Možnosti distribuce obsahu na příkladu vybraných českých a zahraničních médií* [online]. 2016. Bachelor's thesis. Univerzita Karlova, Fakulta sociálních věd, Katedra žurnalistiky. Vedoucí práce Ing. Miloš Čermák. Available at: <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/download/130179867/?lang=cs>

VERNEŘOVÁ, Rebecca Salome. *Ochota přispívat prostřednictvím crowdfundingu v České republice* [online]. 2016. Bachelor's thesis. Univerzita Karlova, Fakulta sociálních věd, Institut ekonomických studií. Vedoucí práce Petr Polák, MSc. Available at: <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/download/130181145/?lang=cs>

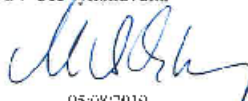
SVRKALA, Marek. *Nové trendy v oblasti monetizace počítačových her* [online]. 2016. Master's thesis. Univerzita Karlova, Filozofická fakulta, Ústav informačních studií – studia nových médií. Vedoucí práce Mgr. Vít Šišler, Ph.D. Available at: <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/download/120241554/?lang=cs>

Datum / Podpis studenta/ky

07.08.2019



TUTO ČÁST VYPLŇUJE PEDAGOG/PEDAGOŽKA:

Doporučení k tématu, struktuře a technice zpracování materiálu:	
Případně doporučení dalších titulů literatury předepsané ke zpracování tématu:	
Potvrzuji, že výše uvedené teze jsem s jejich autorem/autorkou konzultoval(a) a že téma odpovídá mému oborovému zaměření a oblasti odborné práce, kterou na FSV UK vykonávám.	
Souhlasím s tím, že budu vedoucí(m) této práce.	
Mehmet A. Orhan, PhD	
05.06.2019.....
Příjmení a jméno pedagožky/pedagoga	Datum / Podpis pedagožky/pedagoga

TEZE JE NUTNO ODEVZDAT VYTIŠTĚNĚ, PODEPSANÉ A VE DVOU VYHOTOVENÍCH DO TERMÍNU UVEDENÉHO V HARMONOGRAMU PŘÍSLUŠNÉHO AKADEMICKÉHO ROKU, A TO PROSTŘEDNICTVÍM PODATELNÝ FSV UK. PŘIJATE TEZE JE NUTNÉ SI VYZVEDNOUIT V SEKRELIARIÁTU PŘÍSLUŠNÉ KATEDRY A NECHAT VĚVÁZAT DO OBLOU VYTISKŮ DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE.

TEZE NA IKSŽ SCHVÁLIL VE VEDOUČÍ PŘÍSLUŠNÉ KATEDRY.

List of Appendices

Appendix A: The initial semi-structured Interview Guide (table)

Appendix B: The adjusted semi-structured Interview Guide (table)

Appendix C: List of Interviewees (table)

Appendix D: Links to interview records (text)